

The story of the Rip, that narrow turbulent treacherous and sometimes death-dealing whirlpool that connects Port Phillip Bay with the ocean outside, began for the white man 163 years ago. However, before the white-man came and perhaps before aborigines hunted along its shores Port Phillip Bay as we know it today might have been a lake separated at its southern extremity from the ocean by a sandstone barrier.

How, when or why the lake, if indeed it did exist, became a bay is something for the scientist to ponder. It is interesting to note, nevertheless that some sandstone formations do change in shape and size within a lifetime. It is conceivable therefore that a sandstone barrier that once might have existed between Port Phillip Heads could have been worn away as the seas and the centuries rolled by and given us the "Rip" as we know it today.

Towards the end of 1801, H.M.S. "Lady Nelson" under the command of Lt. Grant had been sent to Australia on an exploratory and surveying mission. Lt. Grant, en route to Port Jackson, sighted and named Portland Bay, Cape Otway and Cape Schanck but he did not realize that Port Phillip Bay existed. Later, "Lady Nelson" now under the command of Lt. Murray returned westward and, having been forced to seek shelter, anchored in Western Port Bay. When the weather moderated, Murray sent his Mate, Mr. Bowen, in a whaleboat to investigate the coast between Cape Schanck and Cape Otway.

It was on February, 1 1802 that Mr. Bowen discovered and sailed through the Rip and, upon returning to his ship, reported that "a noble sheet of water" existed inside the entrance. Lt. Murray soon got under way and, on February 15, 1802, brought the first sailing vessel through the rip into Port Phillip Bay. Two months later the great navigator Matthew Flinders also entered the Bay but it was not until October 9, 1803 that the Collins colonising expedition with 300 convicts anchored off Sorrento to be. Apparently Collins did not appreciate the sand dunes nor the lack of fresh water as he soon took his convicts to Van Diemen's Land.

During the short Collins visit some of his convicts escaped. One returned, two were never heard of again, but the fourth, William Buckley, re-appeared 32 years later. We shall meet Mr. Buckley again later in this story.

Little was done to establish a settlement on the shores of Port Phillip Bay for some years. However, John Batman an adventurous young man of Van Diemen's Land across Bass Strait, disregarding all opposition to settlement by the Port Jackson government, on May 29, 1835 passed through the Rip en route to his "place for a village". Thus Port Phillip Heads slowly gained recognition and the flow of shipping through the Rip began.

Of Point Lonsdale to the west of the Rip and Point Nepean to the east, the latter is of little consequence in this story. Point Lonsdale on the other hand has an interesting history but to put it in its right perspective Queenscliff, three miles to the north, must first be introduced.

Queenscliff, although not yet carrying that name, was conceived in 1842. In that year, during a survey of Port Phillip Bay by Captain Hobson (after who Hobson's Bay is named) in H.M.S. "Rattlesnake", a Master Gunner by name Shortland drew attention to a prominent headland. Perhaps out of respect for the Master Gunner, or perhaps because there was no other suitable name readily available, this headland and the peninsula that adjoined it were given the name "Shortland's Bluff." This name was carried forward to the first settlement in the area.

But eight years were to pass before settlement commenced. In 1850 a Mr. James Stephens obtained a Government lease of Shortland's Bluff and, having built himself a house there, moved in with his wife and mother. However, isolation and monotony soon drove this family away and for a time the holding was left in the hands of a stockman who provided fresh meat to passing sailing ships.

In September 1851, a family named Dod, having arrived at Geelong from England in the clipper ship "Statesman", met Mr. Stephens and soon negotiated a transfer of the Shortland's Bluff Lease. Two days were spent in cutting a track from Geelong to the property 20 miles away and this suggests that Stephens, when he built his house, brought the material by sea and not overland from Geelong.

By this time it was approaching 18 years since Batman chose his "place for a village". In the meantime the population of Melbourne, and Geelong, was growing apace and soon a demand arose for a seaside resort. In 1852 Shortland's Bluff was selected as a suitable site. It was surveyed cut up, sold to willing buyers many from the goldfields with funds to spare, and re-named "Queenscliff" after Queen Victoria. Soon Cobb and Co. coaches and the first of the "Bay" steamers were bringing holiday makers to the seaside.

Mr. Dod, the first permanent settler at Queenscliff became the first Postmaster there in 1854. A son followed in his footsteps and held the joint position of Postmaster and Signals Master until 1884. Several headstones in the Point Lonsdale cemetery carry the name of Dod but these seem to be the only memorials to the family that took the first hand in shaping the destiny of one of our popular seaside areas.

Although settlement did not get under way until 1852, a lighthouse was built at Shortland's Bluff in 1842. This was a wooden structure with an oil-burning lamp. With the introduction of a second lighthouse to give a lead through the Rip, the older light became known as the "lower" light while the new one took on the designation "higher" light.

An adequate supply of fresh water proved to be a problem during the early development of Queenscliff, and the surrounding district. At first, wooden barrels sunk in the earth near The Springs midway between Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale were used to collect seepage water. It was not until 1889 that the first public water supply was laid down.

Fishing and boat-building both were developed as organised industries at Queenscliff. For a time the

crayfish and barracouta, caught outside the Rip, were sent to the Melbourne market by sea. The opening of the Queenscliff to Geelong railway on February 21, 1878 was a great event for it enabled the fishermen to more quickly get their catches to market, and eliminated much of the Cobb and Co. coach traffic. It is helped to increase the tourist trade which in turn helped to more quickly develop Queenscliff and district.

While Queenscliff is developing as a seaside resort, basking in the sunshine or shivering in the southerly gales, we must take a closer look at Point Lonsdale.

There is little doubt that William Buckley, the convict who escaped near Sorrento in 1803 and who had lived with the aborigines in the meantime and in doing so had travelled round the Bay, was the first white "resident" at Point Lonsdale. Tradition says that he lived in "Buckley's Cave" in the cliff beneath the site of the present Lighthouse until found by John Batman when buying land from the natives in 1835.

Between 1854 and 1863 an old mariner, Captain Preston, with the safety of shipping in mind, lived with his daughter in a tent at Point Lonsdale and nightly through those lonely nine years fixed to the mast of his self-built signal station a little lamp that burnt colza oil. Captain Preston's self-imposed task ended when the old original wooden lighthouse was moved from Queenscliff and erected at a point some 500 yards west of the site of the present lighthouse. This old light functioned for thirty-nine years being exhibited for the last time on the evening of March 19, 1902. It was not demolished until 1912 when it was found that swarms of bees had made it their home. The existing lighthouse functioned for the first time at sunset on March 20, 1902.

Point Lonsdale, too, soon began to attract holiday makers. As the years rolled by, "Bay" steamers including the "Lady Bird", "Williams", "Ozone", "Hygeia" and "Weeroona" to name but a few, carried their human freight to Queenscliff, whence those who wished to do so, travelled to Point Lonsdale in four, and sometimes six-in-hand horse drawn drags and in cabs. The first boarding house which opened at Point Lonsdale in 1885 occupied the present site of "The Terminus". "Cottee's Coffee Palace" was the forerunner of the present "Kora Weari", while "Merrilyn" opened early in 1900.

The first shop, that sold afternoon teas, and half-penny bars of chocolate, opened in early 1900's. This shop with few changes can be seen today near the entrance to the lighthouse reserve. Indeed, apart from the addition of a few amenities such as running water, hot showers and TV, some of the first guest houses have changed but little during the passing years. Some of these have been handed on from father to son.

Between 1901 and 1910 the head lighthouse keeper was also the Point Lonsdale Postmaster. He handled the mail and sold stamps through a window of a converted bedroom in his house which is there today, second from the ramp that leads to the lighthouse. In April 1910 the Post Office services were handed over to a Mr. Gill who opened an office in his residence at a more central position. This service was handed over

from father to daughter but still is conducted in the same building.

A chapter in the history of ship to shore communication rightly belongs to Point Lonsdale.

On the occasion of the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to open the first Federal Parliament in the Melbourne Exhibition Building on May 9, 1901, the Royal Yacht "Ophir" that carried their Royal Highnesses was fitted with one of the first wireless installations. An experimental station was installed ashore, in the original signal station at Point Lonsdale, and, operated by Mr. Jenvy a Post Office Engineer, established the first Australian ship-to-shore wireless link. Later in 1906, the first Victorian Marconi wireless station to operate officially was established at The Springs, midway between Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

However, it was not until the tragic iceberg collision of the "Titanic" in the Atlantic Ocean with the loss of 1503 lives on April 14, 1912 that shipborne wireless became commonplace.

Until about 1912, the international code of flag signals was the only means of usual communication between ships at sea and the shore. As this system depended upon recognition of specific flags by their shapes and colours, the system was not only slow but it was not effective at night nor during periods of poor visibility. In 1912 the morse lamp, which was first used on the Australian coast between the steamer "Marloo" and Wilsons Promontory a year earlier came steadily into use. Saturday evenings were always busy at Point Lonsdale when Melbourne football scores were transmitted to passing ships and to the pilot steamer.

A Captain Tobin, who began operating in a private capacity in November, 1838 is credited with being the first sea pilot at Port Phillip Heads. The first licensed pilot was Henry Sutton, whose certificate was dated November 1st 1839.

Life for the early pilots was one of hardship and endurance. The vessels which they used, mere whale-boats, and after about 1854 small schooners were difficult to handle in rough weather, and the tents which housed the pilots when on shore were certainly not designed for comfortable living. However, in 1901 the first pilot steamer "Victoria" came into service. With powered vessels came easier and safer transferring of today as well as more comfortable ship-board conditions.

The pride of Port Phillip sea pilots is the "Wyuna", a twinscrew diesel electric ship especially designed for use at the Heads. Although "Wyuna" has a maximum endurance of twelve months in service, her usual time on station is six months. When transferred to Melbourne for overhaul her duties are performed by the relief vessel "Akuna" ex H.M.A.S. "Gladstone".

As the treacherous waters of the Rip began to inflict their toll on early shipping the need was soon felt for a sea-rescue service. In 1865 the first lifeboat at the Heads was established at Queenscliff. Following the building of a pier at Point Lonsdale, a lifeboat was stationed there also. Then, as today, fishermen made up the life boat crews. It was not until 1926 that a motor lifeboat was brought into use at Queenscliff. Today, one lifeboat still remains, resting on a slipway at Queenscliff and always ready for immediate use.

Shipwrecks in and near the Rip have been many and various. They have included small ketches and schooners, full-rigged ships, barques, steamers, and at least one overseas royal Mail liner. The total number of wrecks in this area is probably now more than fifty, in addition to which there have been perhaps another fifty instances of collisions, stranding, refloatings, and similar mishaps without the complete loss of the vessels concerned.

Some wrecks have resulted from poor seamanship and perhaps carelessness, while some have resulted from bad luck, adverse weather or lack of local knowledge, but the "Rip" itself must take the blame for many misfortunes.

The Rip has always been a hazard to vessels entering and leaving Port Phillip Bay due largely to the ebb tide surging out through the narrow bay entrance and boiling up over a rocky submarine platform between the Heads with an effect similar to rapids in a river. When this torrent meets with heavy seas one of the world's greatest hazards to marine navigation is created.

Today the dangers of the Rip have been steadily reduced. The state of the tide is continually transmitted from Point Lonsdale by the use of canvas shapes or coloured lights. Blasting has gradually increased the maximum depth of water at the Rip since 1881 from 28 feet to 43. But the fury of the Rip remains undaunted, and the spectacle of the ebb tide is no less awe-inspiring now than it was to the first white visitors.